

And it's a good budget. It's a budget that achieves some important objectives. One, it understands our top priority is to defend our country, so we fund our military, as well as fund the homeland security.

Secondly, the budget keeps our economy growing. It's central that we make sure that we deal with the uncertainties—the economic uncertainties we face. And that's why we're working hard with the House and the Senate to get a growth package out quickly that will put money in the hands of consumers and provide incentives to small businesses and large businesses to invest.

Thirdly, we recognize that in order for this economy to grow, it's important to make the tax relief permanent. And that's what this budget reflects. It's a budget that boosts money for education and health and housing. It helps deal with the issue of making the Tax Code more fair for individuals who want to buy health insurance in the individual market.

This budget is one that keeps spending under control; discretionary spending is held to less than 1 percent. It eliminates 151 wasteful or bloated programs, saving

the taxpayers \$18 billion. It also takes a hard look at entitlement growth over the next 5 years and provides specific recommendations to save \$208 billion over those 5 years. At the same time, the budget achieves balance by 2012.

This is a good, solid budget. It's not only an innovative budget, in that it's coming to Congress over the Internet, it's a budget that's balanced—it gets to balance in 2012 and saves taxpayers money.

You know, in my State of the Union, I said to the Congress that there's a lot of talk about entitlement spending. Once again, we've proposed specific reforms and specific measures. And Congress needs to come up with its own ideas. And Congress needs to respond to these looming deficits as a result of unfunded liabilities inherent in Social Security and Medicare. Our budget does that. Our budget protects America and encourages economic growth. Congress needs to pass it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:57 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Remarks Honoring the 2007 NASCAR Nextel Cup Champion February 5, 2008

The President. You know, one of the things I love about NASCAR is not only are these great athletes, but they're socially minded folks. And Chandra and Jimmie and I met several times—one time at a place where the folks of NASCAR are putting something back into the community to help the less fortunate. In this case, it happened to be in a place called Victory Junction in North Carolina, and it was a fabulous experience. And I want to thank

you all very much for taking your fame and lending it to help somebody in need. It's really what makes America a great place. And you're leaders on the track and leaders off the track.

Jimmie Johnson. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:09 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson and his wife Chandra.

Statement on the Appointment of President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete of Tanzania as President of the African Union and Foreign Minister Jean Ping of Gabon as Chair of the Commission of the African Union
February 5, 2008

I congratulate President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania on his appointment as the new President of the African Union, as well as Foreign Minister Jean Ping of Gabon on his appointment as the new Chair of the Commission of the African Union. I am confident that the African Union and the people of Africa will be well served by the leadership and vision President Kikwete and Minister Ping will bring to these important posts.

The African Continent has experienced important progress in recent years. Economic growth is at historic highs; democracy is taking root in many countries; and

efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other infectious diseases are showing results. Difficult challenges remain, including ending genocide in Darfur, restoring peace and stability to Kenya, and bringing freedom to the Zimbabwean people. The United States looks forward to working closely with President Kikwete, Minister Ping, and the African Union to address these challenges and to build on recent achievements to secure a better future for all Africans.

Laura and I look forward to beginning our visit to Africa next week.

Message on the Observance of the Lunar New Year, 2008
February 5, 2008

I send greetings to those celebrating the Lunar New Year, the Year of the Rat.

Throughout our country and around the world, men and women of Asian descent welcome the Lunar New Year with a spirit of giving and renewed hope. This holiday, filled with vibrant traditions, celebrates new beginnings and recognizes the enduring wisdom of ancestors. During this special time of year, millions of people reunite with family and friends, reflect on the past, and look forward to a future of prosperity and opportunity.

The Lunar New Year also reminds us of the richness of Asian culture and the significance of its history. By preserving and sharing their heritage, Asian Americans enhance the American experience and contribute to our country's legacy of diversity.

Laura and I send our best wishes for peace, health, and happiness in the New Year.

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.